Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

Southwark, 30th October 2026, London

by Mikey Young

Outside Southwark tube station lies the body of a lady. It has been raining solidly for the last hour, and she is soaked to the bone. None of the other daily commuters have even noticed her. If they had, they would have seen her back curled and her knees brought up almost to her chest. Her umbrella resides at her feet. If you took a picture now, she would look like a question mark. Which is exactly what the white-suited forensic person is doing.

DCI Monica Braintree arrives first, along with DCI Frank Stonewall. Both their faces are dripping wet. Their clothes are sticking to them. DCI Braintree makes a futile effort to unstick her blouse from her back. DCI Stonewall nods to the body.

"I'd watch my step if I were you — accidents are terribly punctual around here."

DCI Braintree pushes her blond hair out of her eyes and groans.

"She's young, too young," replies DCI Braintree, and her voice breaks. Christ. She's been doing this for over ten years. When does it get any easier? She casts her eye over the body and continues.

"Early twenties, medium height and build. Ligature marks around her neck. Broken nails from her defence. Her shoes are scuffed, and the buckle on her bag is snapped. She put up quite a fight."

"When did the world become so uncaring?" barks DCI Stonewall, glaring at the passer-by, who accidentally kicks the umbrella.

They move out of the way as the forensic team erects a gazebo. Finally, the rain has eased.

They go back to the car and stare out the window. London is a palette of concrete-jungle greys, hippopotamus grey, squirrel grey and even an elephant-with-a-castle grey. The odd twinkle of light from the river and glass. The skyscrapers reflect across the bonnet and windscreen.

The smell of greasy chicken shops, diesel and dirt. The jarring cacophony of noise. Horns and people spreading the gospel. The rumble of buses and the taste of their fumes. The filthy pulse of a quickening heart.

They arrive back at headquarters. They haven't spoken the entire journey. Some days, silence is your best friend. The quietness is broken as they enter the office. The clicks of keyboards, the hushed conversations, the never-ending ringing of phones. DCI Stonewall picks up.

"Stonewall."

There's a muffled voice on the other end. DCI Braintree can't make out the words.

"There's been another."

"Another what?" snaps DCI Stonewall, removing his sodden jacket.

"A murder. Canning Town. Male, mid-forties," says the muffled voice.

DCI Braintree grabs DCI Stonewall's jacket and turns on her heels. As DCI Stonewall finishes, she says, "Is this connected?"

"I am none the wiser. Your guess is as good as mine."

The journey doesn't take long this time. They put the siren on and drive through puddles. They both feel dreadful in their damp clothes and roll down the windows in an attempt to dry themselves.

In Canning Town, there are only a few civil servants and the body. They walk towards the police officer who is already taping off the scene. They look at the body. The man is dressed in a navy pinstriped suit. It would have looked expensive and pristine had it not been for the rose of blood at the top left pocket. His arms are at the sides of his perfectly straight body. His bowler hat is at his feet. If you were to take a picture now, he would look like an exclamation mark. Which is exactly what the white-suited forensic person is doing now.

While the officers take in the scene, the white-suited forensic person admires their work and snaps another picture.